From *Armenian Tsopk/Kharpert*, Volume 3
in the series *Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces*, edited by
Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA, 2002), Chapter 11, pp. 273-325.

❀ 11 ❀

KHARPERT:
THE VIEW FROM THE UNITED STATES CONSULATE

Barbara J. Merguerian

The establishment of the United States Consulate in Kharpert on January 1, 1901, was a result of America's increasingly internationalist foreign policy, fueled by popular theories about the country's "manifest destiny" to take a more prominent place among the great nations of the world. United States foreign policy was now breaking out of the constraints established by the hitherto dominant Monroe Doctrine, which advised the nation to remain aloof from overseas entanglements and to limit its foreign initiatives to the Western hemisphere. The Kharpert consulate closed its doors in April 1917, when the U.S. entry into World War I led to a break in diplomatic relations with Turkey, an ally of Germany. During its sixteen years of operation, the consulate gathered a wealth of information about political, economic, and social conditions in the city and province of Kharpert. Not only did the consuls provide insight into the events taking place there (for example, the firmness of an unusually courageous governor who in the spring of 1909 prevented a major massacre similar to the bloodshed taking place in and around Adana), but they also made frequent forays outside of the province. One of the consuls was in contact with the Armenian revolutionaries Andranik (Antranig) and Kevork Chavush in Van and became the first United States official to visit the Holy See of the Armenian Church at Echmiadzin, then located in the Russian Empire. The last consul had the distinction of being the only American diplomat in the Turkish interior during the momentous events of World War I.

At first glance, Kharpert (usually called Harput or Harpoot by the Americans) may seem an unusual focus for United States interests. Unlike most consulates, which historically have been located along the seacoast, on major trade routes, or in large commercial centers,

This material is presented solely for non-commercial educational/research purposes.

the city of Kharpert was situated 750 miles from the capital of Constantinople (Istanbul) and 400 miles inland from the nearest seaport at Samsun on the Black Sea. It could be reached only after travel along mountainous, poorly maintained, and often dangerous roads. United States trade with Turkey was relatively insignificant, and with Kharpert it was almost negligible. The potential for economic development and trade with the United States was impressive, but it depended on fundamental improvements in the political, social, and economic structure of the province.[1]

In the absence of economic interests, the immediate impetus for the establishment of the consulate came from the American missionaries, who had made Kharpert a major center of their activities in the Ottoman Empire and who were anxious to protect their religious and educational institutions.[2] In their endeavors, the missionaries, with firm ties to prominent American educators and political figures, enjoyed widespread support in Protestant churches and parishes across the country. In the early decades of the American mission in the Ottoman Empire (beginning in 1819), the Americans depended to a great extent on the good offices of the strongest Protestant power in the area, Great Britain. It was the British ambassador, Sir Stratford Canning, who had negotiated vigorously with the Ottoman government to achieve some degree of religious freedom in the empire (at least on paper) and was also largely responsible for the recognition of the Protestant community or *millet* in 1850.

By the end of the nineteenth century, partly to avoid association with the growing imperialism of the European powers and partly to see their own nation play a more prominent role in the region, the

---

[1] Statistics on U.S. trade with Turkey can be found in Leland James Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey, 1830-1930: An Economic Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932).

[2] On the missionary movement and U.S. foreign policy toward Turkey, see Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810-1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971). On missionary programs in Turkey, the standard works include James L. Barton, *Daybreak in Turkey* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1908); Frank Andrews Stone, *Academies for Anatolia: A Study of the Rationale, Program and Impact of the Educational Institutions Sponsored by the American Board in Turkey: 1830-1980* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); and William E. Strong, *The Story of the American Board: An Account of the First Hundred Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1910).

missionaries looked increasingly to their own government for protection. And protection was needed as the sultan's government, which had initially shown disinterest or indifference to the missionaries, began to interfere in their activities. The Muslim majority of the population was barred by Ottoman law and custom from participating in missionary programs, and there was a growing concern that American education was affecting the attitudes of Armenians in ways the government did not understand and therefore feared. Laws passed to regulate the missionary schools were often administered arbitrarily by local officials, thus heightening the concern of the missionaries —especially those in the interior—who depended on the United States Legation in Constantinople to settle their problems with the local government and to address issues of their safety. In a time of primitive roads and undeveloped communications, the Americans serving in the interior understandably felt isolated and even threatened. The breakdown of law and order left them at the mercy of brigands and thieves as they traveled between their various stations and outstations. The central government became progressively weaker, not only being unable or unwilling to preserve law and order in the provinces, but itself being responsible for unleashing the massive bloodshed of the Armenian massacres of the 1890s.

For a number of reasons, such as the remarkable ability of well-qualified missionaries and the isolation of the area, the American mission in Kharpert, established in 1855, was particularly successful. During the 1895 massacres, however, the mission was hard hit, with many of its buildings destroyed and the lives of the missionaries seriously threatened. The violence had a devastating effect on the Armenian population, which constituted overwhelmingly the native clients of the missionaries. Undeterred, and with a government indemnity in hand for the 1895 losses, the missionaries pressed ahead to restore their buildings and reinstate their programs. According to the annual report for 1898, Kharpert boasted 63 mission schools with almost 4,000 pupils, another 450 adults under instruction, and the jewel of the mission—Euphrates College—with an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students in all its departments combined.[3]

---

[3] The Harpoot Report for 1898 is no. 154, ABC 16.9.7, Eastern Turkey Mission, vol. 10, in the American Board of Commissioners of American Missions (ABCFM) Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Establishment of the Consulate

The missionaries had called for the establishment of a United States Consulate in Kharpert as early as 1858.[4] The appeal fell on deaf ears at first, the United States being preoccupied with internal problems during the Civil War and its aftermath. The missionaries and their sponsors (who have been characterized as one of the first major lobby groups in the United States) persisted, and in 1885, the first U.S. consulate in the interior of Turkey was established, in Sivas (Sebastia). By 1895, Congress had been persuaded to approve two additional consulates, and two employees of the Department of State, Robert S. Chilton, Jr., and William Dudley Hunter, were assigned to Erzerum and to Kharpert, respectively. In route to their new posts, the two men were delayed in Constantinople because the Ottoman government refused to issue the necessary papers. It was finally decided to send the diplomats to their posts without diplomatic recognition, but they traveled only as far as Samsun when the unleashing of the 1895 massacres created such a dangerous situation in the interior that the two men were recalled and sent home.[5]

Pressure by the missionary establishment and its many supporters kept the issue of American consulates in the Turkish interior alive. In 1898, Leo Berkholz was recognized as the United States Consul in Erzerum, and in 1900, Dr. Thomas H. Norton was nominated to Kharpert. The violence of the 1890s, rather than discouraging activity by the American missionaries, actually heightened their determination to continue their programs and even to expand them; retreat was out of the question for these indefatigable workers. One might think that the 1894-96 massacres, during which an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 Armenians lost their lives and countless others were left

---

[4] Missionaries E.E. Bliss and G.W. Dunmore, in a letter written from Kharpert to Dr. Rufus Anderson, ABCFM Secretary in Boston, complained of "repeated outrages on missionaries in the interior" and asserted that the United States should protect the Americans there, especially in light of the "turbulent character" of the local population and the long distance from the capital. ABCFM Archives, ABC 16.7.1, Mission to the Armenians, vol. 9, no. 143, July 6, 1858.

[5] Barbara J. Merguerian, "The American Response to the Armenian Massacres of 1895: A Foreign Policy Dilemma," in *Genocide and Human Rights: Lessons from the Armenian Experience*, special issue of the *Journal of Armenian Studies* 4:1-2 (1992): 53-83.

homeless and destitute, would have indicated a level of violence that would make it impossible for any consular official—no matter how able—to affect in any appreciable way the course of events. Such was the level of confidence enjoyed by the Western nations at the time, however, that they believed a consular official could make a difference in this kind of situation. "In Turkey one consul can hold in check, without lifting a finger, a horde of ruffians," a missionary wrote in December 1895. "He is like a policeman in a mob."[6]

The nomination of Dr. Norton to the consulate in Kharpert in June 1900 was the first step in what turned out to be a lengthy process of negotiation with the Ottoman government before the necessary authorization was granted. In general, the Sublime Porte strongly resisted the establishment of American consulates in the interior, arguing that the United States did not have sufficient commercial interests to warrant consulates there. Washington asserted that the treaty of 1830, which established relations between the two nations, gave the United States the right to establish consulates wherever it deemed them necessary. Protracted negotiations had been required before the United States gained official recognition of the first interior consulates in Turkey, at Sivas and Erzerum. The Erzerum consulate was established only after the United States withheld recognition of a newly appointed Turkish consul in Boston.[7]

In the case of Kharpert, the process was similarly protracted. The designated consul, Thomas Norton, arrived in Constantinople in July 1900 and remained in the capital for four months awaiting his *exequatur*, or diplomatic papers. An energetic person with knowledge of several languages, Norton made good use of his time and developed contacts which provided him with valuable information, particularly concerning the competition for influence in the East.

---

[6] Letter from Henry O. Dwight, Constantinople, to Judson Smith, Foreign Secretary of the ABCFM, Dec. 21, 1895, in United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), p. 1457.

[7] On the establishment of the consulate in Sivas, see Barbara J. Merguerian, "Sebastia: View From the United States Consulate," paper delivered at the conference on Armenian Sebastia/Sivas, in the UCLA series on Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces (publication forthcoming). On Erzerum, see United States, National Archives (US Archives), RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Diplomatic Instructions, Turkey 7, no. 186, July 28, 1898 (microcopy 77, roll 168).

According to Norton's sources, after the American application was made for recognition of a consul in Kharpert, Russia had followed suit and indeed had even received approval while Norton was still cooling his heels in the capital. As it turned out, however, the Russian consulate was eventually established in Bitlis, not Kharpert. Norton offered an interesting assessment of Russian motives to the Department of State: "[Russia] intends to meet and counteract the growing influence of American ideas, religious, educational, and economic, upon the orthodox Armenian population of this section—probably in view of ultimate Russian possession of the territory in question."[8]

As the end of the year 1900 approached, with the realization that the winter season would make travel to the interior difficult if not impossible, Norton was authorized by the U.S. Legation in Constantinople to proceed to Kharpert armed with a travel permit (*teskere*), but he still lacked his *exequatur*. Despite this absence of proper credentials, Norton experienced no difficulties during his journey to Kharpert; on the contrary, he reported that he was cordially received by local Ottoman officials along the way. Upon his arrival in Kharpert on December 25, Norton lost no time in calling on Turkish officials, beginning with the *vali* (governor) Rauf Bey, the military commander Shamsi Pasha, and the mayor. "Altogether I could not ask for a more friendly and satisfactory reception if I had brought my *exequatur* with me," an enthusiastic Norton reported. Needless to say, he was also warmly greeted by the foreign residents in the area, not only by President Caleb Gates of Euphrates College, who was his host, but also by the German colony and the head of the Catholic mission.[9] Dr. Gates was particularly pleased because the previous summer, while Norton was in the capital, the Ottoman

---

[8] Russia's second motive, according to Norton, was to challenge "the rapidly growing commercial and economic influence of Germany in Asia Minor." US Archives, RG 59, Despatches from the United States Consuls in Harput, 1895-1906, no. 9, Sept. 5, 1900 (microcopy T-579, roll 1), cited hereafter as Despatches from Harput.

[9] Despatches from Harput, no. 18, Dec. 26. 1900. Norton claimed an immediate rapport with the governor's dragoman or interpreter, Husni Bey, whose academic career like his own had included study in Paris and Berlin and a doctorate from Heidelberg. See Norton's personal letter to David J. Hill, Assistant Secretary of State, Jan. 14, 1901, enclosed in Despatches from Harput.

government had finally granted to the American missionaries in Kharpert their long-sought permission to rebuild the school and college buildings destroyed during the 1895 massacres.

It did not take long for Norton to respond to the sensitivities of the Turkish government in regard to Armenia and the Armenians. On January 10, 1901 (that is, only ten days after the opening of the consulate), upon sending his new address to his superiors, he advised them that "the designation 'Armenia' occurring frequently on the wrappers of printed matter addressed to this Consulate should be carefully avoided. It is like flaunting a red flag before a bull to a Turkish functionary." The name was replaced by "Anatolia." But his further suggestion that the designation of the consulate be changed to the new Turkish name for the city and province (*vilayet*), Mamuret ul-Aziz, "which gives proper geographic or administrative designation," met with no response from Washington.[10] It is interesting to note, however, that in the Trade Reports of the United States Department of Commerce during this period, which occasionally include information from Kharpert, the district is sometimes placed in Turkey, at other times in Anatolia, and still other times under the designation of Armenia.[11]

Although the State Department identified the consulate as "Harput," the consulate was not, strictly speaking, located in the city of Kharpert but rather in the new provincial capital of Mezre (Mezireh), in a house "a few steps" from the office of the vali. The city of Kharpert, Norton wrote to his superiors, sat atop a mountain about 1,000 feet above sea level and no longer served as the administrative and commercial center of the region, as it once had because of its strategic position. Mezre (present-day Elazığ), situated on the plain less than 3 miles distant, lay directly on the caravan route from Baghdad to the Black Sea and had been growing rapidly at the expense of Kharpert, especially after 1895. While the distance of the consulate in Mezre from the missionary compound at Kharpert was inconvenient, the mission was visible from the windows of the consulate, and an elaborate system of signals (with mirrors, using Morse Code) was developed so that, in case of need, messages could be

---

[10] Despatches from Harput, no. 26, Jan. 10, 1901.

[11] United States, Department of Commerce and Labor, *Monthly Consular Reports* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900-1910).

easily exchanged.[12]

The Ottoman government finally recognized the United States Consulate in Kharpert on October 15, 1901, fifteen months after the first request had been made and more than nine months after the envoy had arrived at his post. It may not be coincidental that the Turkish action came three days after a visiting diplomat, General Horace Porter, the U.S. ambassador to Paris, was received by the sultan in Constantinople. On November 25, 1901, the local American colony joined Norton at the consulate to raise the United States flag for the first time in Kharpert province.[13]

The Consuls and Their Reports

The house rented by Norton for the consulate as well as his living quarters had formerly been occupied by a British vice consul and was described as one of the few three-story buildings in Mezre, a city of wide streets and prominent gardens. The owner was an Armenian lawyer, Sarkis Kourkdjian, a Protestant who lived next door and who had two sons studying at the American College in Beirut.[14] When Norton arrived, he was the only full-time foreign diplomat in the area. According to the State Department, his consular district also included the neighboring province of Diarbekir, although the Turkish government did not recognize this jurisdiction.[15] British interests in Kharpert were represented by a vice consul stationed in Diarbekir, while Russian interests were under the jurisdiction of the consul in Bitlis (who also covered Diarbekir). France reinstated its consul in Kharpert after an absence of twenty-five years when Édouard Perroud was appointed in January 1904. There was also an

---

[12] Despatches from Harput, no. 19, Jan. 1, 1901.

[13] US Archives, RG 59, Despatches from the U.S. Minister to Turkey, vol. 70, nos. 92-93, Oct. 12 and 15, 1901 (microcopy 46, roll 68). The raising of the flag was reported by Norton in Despatches from Harput, no. 73, Nov. 25, 1901.

[14] Despatches from Harput, no. 23, Jan. 8, 1901.

[15] The Ottoman government considered a consul's jurisdiction to be limited to the province to which he was assigned, while U.S. regulations gave a consul responsibility for a city "and such other places as shall be nearer thereto than to the residence of any other Consul or Vice-Consul of the United States within the same allegiance." See the comments of the U.S. Consul in Sivas regarding the impracticality of the American definition, in US Archives, RG 59, Despatches from the U.S. Consul in Sivas, 1886-1906, no. 204, April 28, 1906 (microcopy T-681).

Iranian consular agent in Kharpert.

The bloodshed of 1895 continued to cast its long shadow over the area in many ways. The economy never recovered from the destruction of that time, and the political situation was frequently described as tense, with both Armenians and Turks anticipating another outbreak of violence at any moment. Soon after his arrival, Norton pointed out to the State Department that "no United States consulate in Asia or Africa is so far removed from the seaboard," and he reminded his superiors that a short six years earlier "the Americans here had been forced to flee for their lives and robbed of all but the clothing on their backs."[16] His successor, Evan Young, wrote in 1906: "Perhaps in no other consular district in the American service is there the continued feeling of unrest and insecurity." It was true that the consul enjoyed a certain amount of prestige and that his reports to the State Department or to the U.S. Embassy in Constantinople would probably be taken seriously. But with only a small staff, there was little he could do in case of a major outbreak of violence except to demand protection for the American missionaries under his jurisdiction and to report to his superiors.

The consulate in Kharpert was unique in the large percentage of its business devoted to the problems of the native Armenians who had emigrated to the United States but who retained ties with the homeland. It had never been the policy of the missionaries to encourage Armenians to emigrate to the United States, but contact with Americans—along with repressive political conditions and a depressed economy—spurred many to seek their fortunes in the New World. Statistics of the numbers of such Armenians are inexact, but they were considerable. The consuls estimated that four-fifths of the Armenians who had emigrated to the United States had come from Kharpert, and they put the figure at somewhere between 12,000 (Norton in 1903) to 64,000 people (Masterson in 1909). Turkish official policy toward this emigration fluctuated: at times, it was completely forbidden, at other times, payment of a bribe to a local official was required, and sometimes wives and children were allowed to emigrate to join their husbands and fathers. "What an amount of bother and correspondence the matters of these naturalized

[16] Despatches from Harput, no. 66, Sept. 17, 1901.

Armenians cause us!" complained Norton in 1903.[17] The work consisted of transfers of funds from Armenians living in the United States to their relatives in Kharpert (made all the more difficult by the confusion of Armenian names and lack of precise addresses); assistance in obtaining travel permits to America for wives and children initially left behind; and also the protection of the rights of Armenians who had emigrated to the United States, obtained citizenship, and then returned to Kharpert. The latter category posed the largest number of problems because the Ottoman and U.S. governments were long in dispute about the status of these Armenians —the Sublime Porte either refusing to recognize their acquired citizenship and treating them as Ottoman subjects or else deporting them.[18] Because of this policy, many returning naturalized Armenians used their Ottoman passports to enter the country, thus forfeiting their right to American protection. In 1906 the number of registered naturalized Armenians in Kharpert was reported as 64, but the real number was estimated as being at least 500.[19]

The quality and quantity of reports coming out of the Kharpert consulate varied considerably depending on the personal characteristics and interests of the consuls. During this period, the United States was taking its first steps to place the foreign service on a professional level. In 1905, Secretary of State Elihu Root characterized consular service as "a place to shelve broken-down politicians and to take care of failures in American life . . . at government expense."[20] Of the four consuls who served in Kharpert, Norton was the best educated, but he was totally lacking in diplomatic experi-

---

[17] US Archives, RG 84, Records of the U.S. Consulate in Harput, Turkey, C41 (C3), Miscellaneous Record Books (June to December 1903), p. 469; "Annual Trade Report for 1913," dated February 2, 1914, copy found in C41 (C8.1), Letters (July 1913-May 1914).

[18] A discussion of the problem of naturalized Armenians can be found in Ralph Elliott Cook, "The United States and the Armenian Question, 1894-1924," Ph.D. Dissertation (Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1957), pp. 46-50.

[19] US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.4), Despatch Book (Harput, 1906), "Work of the Consulate," Jan. 25, 1906.

[20] Quoted in Robert L. Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1986), p. 93. A similar low opinion of consuls during this period is expressed by one of them, George Horton, *Recollections Grave and Gay: The Story of a Mediterranean Consul* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1927), chapter 8.

ence. Born in Rushford, New York, in 1851, the son of a Presbyterian minister, he was a brilliant scholar, graduating from Hamilton College in 1873 as valedictorian of his class. After ten years as a student in Europe, where he earned a doctorate in chemistry from the University of Heidelberg in 1875 and then continued his studies at the universities of Berlin and Paris, he eventually served as manager of a chemical plant in St. Denis, France. In 1883, Norton returned to the United States and accepted the chair in chemistry at the University of Cincinnati. He published widely in scientific journals and served as a board member of several academic and medical institutions. In 1895, complying with a request from the sultan for an American educator competent to establish an Imperial School of Science at Constantinople, Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham nominated Dr. Norton. The outbreak of the Armenian massacres, however, caused a postponement and subsequent abandonment of the plan. Apparently, the challenge of a foreign assignment appealed to Norton, for in 1900 he applied to the Department of State for a position, and on June 14, 1900, he was appointed by President William McKinley to the new post in Kharpert. He served for four years until July 1905.[21]

Less is known about the two consuls who followed him, Evan E. Young, from September 1905 to September 1908, and William W. Masterson, from October 1908 to May 1914, except that they were career diplomats. Young was a native of North Dakota who was assigned to Kharpert early in his diplomatic career; he subsequently was appointed chief of Middle East Affairs of the Department of State and later served in Latin America. Masterson was a native of Carrollton, Kentucky, and graduated from Cincinnati Law School in 1895; he served in the consulates in Aden and Batum before his assignment to Kharpert.[22] Leslie A. Davis, from May 1914 to April

---

[21] Biographical information is in US Archives, RG 59, Applications and Recommendations for Appointment to the Foreign Service, Norton file, no. 333. See also entry in *The National Cyclopaedia of American Bibliography* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1906), vol. 13. Norton went on to serve in the consulates in Smyrna and then Chemitz, Germany, before leaving government service for a new career with Dupont Chemical Company. His obituary appeared in the *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1941, p. 25.

[22] US Archives, RG 59, 1910-1929, Decimal File, no. 123 (Young, Evan; Masterson, William).

1917, was a native of Port Jefferson, New York, and a graduate of Cornell University and George Washington University Law School. His foreign service experience was limited to a two year stint in Batum before being assigned to Kharpert in May 1914, on the eve of World War I.[23]

Economic Conditions

A major responsibility of a consul is to promote trade, and while all of the American consuls in Kharpert worked energetically in this field, they faced almost insurmountable difficulties. The European powers, especially Great Britain but also France and Germany and to a lesser extent Italy and Austria, had already gained a foothold in the area, were more experienced in selling their wares in Turkish markets, and enjoyed lower shipping costs because of the shorter distances involved. The poverty of the people and the lack of a banking system limited trade. A final factor was the extreme conservatism of the local population, both Christian and Muslim, which did not encourage the learning of new ways or acquisition of new things.

Beginning with his first annual report, filed on October 19, 1901, Consul Norton provided comprehensive information about economic conditions and the financial difficulties faced by the local government. According to this report, for the Ottoman fiscal year of Anno Hijra 1316 (ending on March 31, 1901 A.D.), the provincial budget displayed a large deficit, with revenues totaling $600,390 and expenditures $846,870, for a large shortfall of $246,480. More than half of the revenues came from tithes on grains and produce; the other large revenue producers were the land tax ($133,640) and the military exemption tax ($74,560). On the expenditure side, the overwhelming portion of projected outlays was earmarked to the central government, including by far the largest amount, 42 percent of the total, for the support the Fourth Army Corps stationed in the province, while another 23 percent was designated as requisition for the Ottoman government and contribution to the Ottoman navy, artillery, and civil list. Only 18 percent of the budget was designated for local

---

[23] See Leslie A. Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917*, ed. and intro. Susan K. Blair (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1989), pp. 12-15.

administration, and slightly less, 16 percent, for gendarmerie and police. The only social program listed, public instruction, was allocated approximately 1 percent of the total.

These budget figures, Norton reported, portrayed the province as "headed for bankruptcy." Lacking any provision for deficit financing, the government responded by spending only as much as it collected, regardless of budget allocations. As most of the expenditures were in the form of salaries and as it was unheard of to dismiss local officials, the practical effect of the deficit was the lowering of salaries to an average of 70 percent of what was due. Considering the fact that many civil servants received their full compensation, others received much less and were paid only sporadically. "The procedure is in vogue throughout the Empire, and is one great cause of the prevalent corruption among civil and military functionaries in the East," Norton wrote. He added that the effect of low payment or non-payment of wages to the Fourth Army Corps stationed on the territory helped to explain the discipline problems among the troops.[24]

Despite the fact that Kharpert was predominantly an agricultural area (the main crops were wheat and barley) and that the harvests of 1900 and 1901 had been particularly abundant, the supply of grain was insufficient to meet local needs and a small amount was imported. Conditions were favorable for sheep raising, but prices were low and pasturage inadequate. Mining, despite the riches of the nearby Keban Maden mine, was underdeveloped. Among the local industries, textiles were the most important, particularly silk production, which was steadily growing. The two silk factories in Kharpert and Mezre were flourishing and employed large numbers of operators. The chief source of energy for the looms was hand power, though small engines were used to a limited extent. The products were highly esteemed in oriental markets but had not yet found their way to America. While the cultivation of cotton, particularly at Agn (Eghin) and Arabkir, was sufficient to provide a slight excess for export, the products could not compete with cheap imports from England, Germany, and France. White cotton from the United States

[24] Earlier Norton had reported much insubordination among soldiers and robberies committed by them; their pay was six months in arrears. See Despatches from Harput, no. 46, March 14, 1901.

had just been introduced with great success. "Due to its high quality and low price, it promises to displace completely the English product, which has hitherto held the market," the consul wrote. Other local goods were rugs, woven by the local Kurds and more recently by orphans in the missionary-sponsored orphanages, leather (though the art of tanning was said to be "but imperfectly understood"), and sausage casings. Russian petroleum, even though of inferior quality, had replaced the American product.

Looking at the province's overall trade balance, Norton described a large excess of foreign imports ($585,300) compared with exports ($179,060) in 1900; taking into account internal trade with other parts of the empire, the balance was favorable, with imports valued at $131,190 and exports at $273,400. As a concrete indicator of the economic decline that had followed the massacres of 1895, Norton provided figures for the five years preceding that date, when foreign exports of the province had exceeded by far the imports.

According to the annual economic report he filed in 1901, most of the foreign trade was carried on with the nations of Western Europe. The highest value of imports came from Great Britain ($120,000), then Germany and Austria ($90,000 each), followed by France ($70,000), and Belgium ($56,000). Russia ($25,000) was low on the list; lower still was the United States ($9,000). For exports, the largest customers were France ($128,000) and Great Britain ($60,000), trailed far behind by the United States ($15,000). Trade played an important role in the local economy: France furnished 25 percent of the coffee, 25 percent of the sugar, 10 percent of the tea, 80 percent of the cloth, 10 percent of the haberdashery, 80 percent of the leather, 40 percent of the drugs, and most candles in the province. Exported to France were 80 percent of the local almonds, 80 percent of the wool, 90 percent of the goatskins, and all cocoons.

Within the empire, Kharpert imported sheep from Mardin and Mush, cattle and buffalo from Diarbekir, Baghdad, and Mosul, flour from Sivas, skins from Brusa (Bursa), yarn from Tarsus, copper from Tokat, olive oil and soap from Aleppo, and rice and salt from Diarbekir. The province exported lambs to Angora (Ankara), sheepskins to Aintab and Sivas, raw silk to Aleppo, cotton to Sivas, and wine to Erzerum. Norton was generally optimistic regarding prospects for trade with the United States. He explained: "Competent, live American traders have an excellent opportunity *now* to establish them-

selves in this region and gain such a foothold that serious competition in the future will become a matter of extreme difficulty."[25] Despite this optimism, Norton cited the adverse effects on trade of "restrictions on the movement from one place to another of the Armenian merchants, who constitute the bulk of the trading class." Permits for merchants to travel outside the province of their residence could be obtained only with great difficulty, and "travel to the capital is practically prohibited." Combined with increased taxation, the result was commercial stagnation. On the positive side, Norton noted the widespread influence of the American educational efforts at Kharpert and surrounding areas during their first half century. "Long and continued contact with American teachers, methods, books, educational equipment, and philanthropic agencies has brought about a feeling of respect and admiration for the American home and its accessories . . . for our inventive skill and practical devices, for our business methods and enterprises."[26]

As for specific commodities, Norton pointed to the impressive success of the Singer Sewing Machine, which had been introduced two years earlier and provided a model for other products. He reported that New York Life Insurance Company was also finding success in the area.[27] One American product Norton believed potentially useful was the bicycle. He had brought with him a bicycle, the first two-wheeler ever seen in the area, he claimed. The extensive Kharpert plain, "with its comparatively level and well-kept roads," was well suited to bicycles. "Personally I have found the wheeling excellent, even among the hills over the narrow bridle paths."[28]

An especially promising market for United States manufactures

---

[25] "Annual Economic Report of the Consular District for 1901," US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.4), Despatch Book (Harput, 1900-1903), Oct. 28, 1901, pp. 159-87.

[26] Department of Commerce and Labor, *Monthly Consular Reports*, January 1905, pp. 88-89.

[27] "Annual Economic Report for 1901."

[28] Norton reported with satisfaction the establishment of a bicycle agency, under S.G. Vartabedian, a skilled mechanic formerly employed in the Colt Works at Hartford. He advised that imported bicycles should be simple, low-priced but durable and should take into account "the frequency of stones in the choice of tires." A large room in the consulate was set aside as a commercial museum, in which samples from American manufacturers were on display with labels in English, Armenian, and Turkish. See US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.4), Despatch Book (Harput, 1900-1903), June 19, 1901.

appeared to unfold in the field of agriculture. Agricultural methods across the vast "Golden Plain" of Kharpert were most primitive, and conditions appeared favorable for importing agricultural machines, in whose production the United States excelled. Norton attracted the interest of the governor, who agreed to supply for experimental purposes a nearby tract of land for farming exclusively with American methods and implements. A reaper was ordered, which Norton predicted "should accomplish in a day what eighty men perform with existing facilities."[29] The results of introducing modern machinery to a population whose agricultural methods had been unchanged for centuries can be easily imagined. The following year Norton reported that the imported reaper had "caused no little stir" in an area where the laboring population was so exceptionally dependent on earnings at harvest time. Soon after, the reaper was running regularly and smoothly, causing agricultural wages to fall abruptly by 30 percent—from 20 cents to 14 cents a day. The agent importing the reaper, a graduate of an agricultural college in the United States, faced conditions similar to that which followed introduction of the spinning jenny or the cotton gin. Every attempt was made to wreck the machine. The agent's vegetable garden was destroyed, his fruit trees cut, shots were fired at his house at night, and workers were induced to desert him. The experiment continued with the introduction of a thrasher, but the difficulties persisted. Limiting the usefulness of the machines, Norton admitted, were the terraced arrangement of the irrigated fields, the small size of individual holdings, and the abundance of stones.[30] The consul had nothing but praise for the irrigation methods used by the farmers in the region, based on centuries-old techniques. Indeed, Norton wondered why Kharpert Armenians were so anxious to emigrate to the manufacturing centers of the United States, instead of settling in arid and semi-arid areas where they could put their farming skills and especially their knowledge of irrigation methods to good use.[31]

By early 1907, Consul Evan Young noted the continued "de-

---

[29] "Annual Economic Report for 1901."

[30] "Annual Economic Report of the Consular District for the year ending June 30, 1902," US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.4), Despatch Book (Harput, 1900-1903), Sept. 13, 1902, pp. 290-335.

[31] Despatches from Harput, no. 47, March 14, 1901.

pressed and stagnant state" of the commerce in the region. The general poverty of the people, restriction on the movements of merchants, and a large increase in military expenditures all had a dampening effect. The bright spots included rapid advances in all phases of the silk industry, a general increase in the demand for American goods, and a corresponding increase in imports. A few months later, he reported that antique rugs in the area had been "swept clean" from local markets because of their popularity and were replaced by rugs of inferior design made with chemical (aniline) dyes. Use of these dyes "nearly paralyzed" the rug industry throughout the district.[32]

The reinstatement of the Ottoman Constitution in the wake of the Young Turk revolution in 1908 and the initial actions of the new leaders gave some impetus to trade. For example, the government now removed restriction on mining operations, which opened great possibilities for an area such as Kharpert, with its rich deposits. Minerals found there included gold, silver, coal, marble, platinum, manganese, copper, mica, flint, asbestos, saltpeter, and petroleum. The new governor was described as interested in improvement of all kinds. In addition, the general council of the province decided that money collected from the three ferries over the Euphrates, rather than being invested in a general fund, should be used to build bridges, beginning with the roads to Malatia, Sivas, and the sea.[33]

The conservatism of the population, however, continued to be a problem. One can sense the exasperation of an American consul imbued with the Western notion of progress and having to deal with a population that recognized no need for change, as seen in Consul William Masterson's comments in 1910:

> Just because their forefathers never had such an article, even [one] that seems of the most indispensable nature to one of us, an outsider, their descendants will not use it or will but slowly take to the use of it. It would seem that a bedstead with springs and a mattress or a dining table at which a person could sit on a chair to eat would both be necessary articles of furniture, yet it is a safe hazard to say that there are not, outside of the Mission stations and this Consulate, over

---

[32] Department of Commerce and Labor, *Monthly Consular Reports*, January 1907, p. 96, and June 1907, p. 322.

[33] US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.4), Despatch Book (Harput, 1909-1910), Feb. 4 and April 30, 1909.

> two dozen beds and dining tables in this district, and a further increase of these articles is going to be a slow process, for the mattress on the floor answers every purpose as a bed and the little low table scarcely six inches about the floor around which the people sit on cushions or on the floor as they eat, is their idea of comfort in eating.[34]

By 1913, consular reports cited some encouraging trends in the economy. The Young Turk government and the Italian and Balkan wars had brought with them great uncertainty, but a brief cessation of hostilities, along with good weather for crops, resulted in an economic upturn. Construction, which had been booming in 1912 and then slowed because of the hostilities, promised to revive. Consul Masterson saw a great potential for the development of agriculture "if only there was an educated farming community" willing to adopt advanced techniques and use modern machinery. A bountiful yield of fruits, vegetables, and grains did not result in substantial exports. Locally produced cotton and silk were mostly used in the region and not exported. Thus, Kharpert continued to lack balance in its foreign trade; its imports valued at $2,194,450 were twice as large as the exports of $1,094,000. This trade imbalance, which had continued for many years, was tenable, the consul suggested, only because of the substantial sums of money returned to the local economy by Armenians who were living abroad, mainly in America. Fear of being drafted into the army accounted for the emigration of large numbers of men and boys up to the age of 40. "There is hardly a village but what the residents are principally women, children, old men, and a small sprinkling of younger men," Masterson wrote, adding that often there were not enough men to cultivate the fields. The advantages of the emigration were, first, the large sums of money sent home by Armenians abroad, an estimated $50 annually per person or a total of $600,000 per year. The second advantage came from those Armenians who emigrated to the United States, earned money there, and then returned to open stores to sell American goods. Through their efforts, the excellence of American prod-

---

[34] "Annual Report of Commerce and Industries of the Harput Consular District for the Year 1910," US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.4), Despatch Book (Harput, 1911-1912), Feb. 22, 1911.

ucts became known, especially in cotton goods, second-hand clothing, drugs, toiletries, cutlery, hardware, rubber overshoes, lamps, paper and stationery, metal roofing, and paint. Among the positive signs cited was the installation of a modern ferry at the Euphrates River, reducing the time needed to cross from two, three, or even four hours to twenty minutes. Roads had been repaired and drained, new bridges built, and overall, as the consul believed, "this interior country is gradually waking up."[35]

Political Conditions

Particularly interesting are the consular political reports. Consul Norton commented on the activities of Armenian revolutionaries who, although few in number, attracted massive (and usually ineffective) retaliation by Turkish authorities. In general, the Armenian population of Kharpert was "different from their more turbulent brothers in Van and Bitlis."[36] But Kharpert could not be isolated from the political unrest in the nearby provinces. The underlying tensions between the Armenians and their Muslim overlords, as well as differences within the administration, can be clearly discerned in a major incident that took place in Kharpert in 1903, when thirty-five persons, mostly Armenians, were summarily arrested. Norton's attention was directed to the incident by the missionaries because one of the arrested persons, Nicholas (Nikoghos) Tenekejian, was a prominent professor at Euphrates College as well as the ecclesiastical head of the Protestant community in the province.

In a lengthy report filed on September 2, 1903, Norton summarized the situation as follows: three months earlier (that is, in early June) the police had become aware of a band of smugglers engaged in the "lucrative though risky" occupation of conducting an "underground railroad" to the Russian frontier for the emigration of those Armenians who were unable to secure passports. The smugglers had been captured, but in the process one gendarme was killed. As luck would have it, or perhaps by design, the responsible local officials were absent at the time: the governor was away on an inspection

---

[35] "Annual Trade Report for 1913," US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.1), Letters Received and Sent (Harput, July 1913-May 1914), Feb. 2, 1914.

[36] Despatches from Harput, no. 64, Sept. 12, 1901.

tour, while the mayor had been reassigned to another city and his replacement had not arrived. Under these circumstances, "a clique of fanatical, unprincipled officials were for the moment in control of the city government of Kharpert," animated by "intense hatred of the Christian population and of all foreign institutions and influence and hostility to the vali and a desire to show that he had been neglectful of his duty." Claiming that they had uncovered a revolutionary conspiracy, members of the clique arranged to have numerous Armenians arrested and thrown into prison, along with the smugglers and their confederates, and all of them barbarously treated and tortured in an attempt to force confessions of guilt and especially to implicate the American college and mission. The governor, whom Norton considered "kind and well-meaning," upon his return and being informed of the incident, suffered a paralyzing stroke from which he recovered very slowly. The new mayor was powerless. Even Norton's British colleague, Consul du Vallon, was rendered ineffectual because of a typhoid attack, which left him a patient of the American missionaries.[37] After two months in a Kharpert prison, thirty-five arrested persons were indicted and transferred to Mezre; efforts of the missionaries to arrange bail for Tenekejian were of no avail. Norton closely followed the course of the judicial proceedings. The United States could not claim a direct interest in the case of Ottoman subjects such as Tenekejian, though Norton could hardly be indifferent to the fate of such an important personage in the American missionary community. Two of the arrested men were naturalized American citizens, but because they had entered the country with Ottoman passports, the consul did not actively intervene.[38]

Norton saw grounds for optimism in the successor appointed to

---

[37] Ibid., nos. 102 and 104, Sept. 1 and 28, 1903.

[38] There appears "but little doubt" that the two men, identified only as Semerji Haroutune, sentenced to fifteen years, and Tashjian, sentenced to five years, were connected with the smuggling of weapons and people across the border with Russia, "though in no way responsible for the murder" of the Turkish policeman, Norton wrote. Both "returned here without passports and concealed their naturalization, thus making it impossible for the consulate to intervene," Norton added in a letter dated February 13, 1904. The most complete account of the trial, in barely legible carbon copies, can be found in US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.1), Letters Received and Sent (Harput, Dec. 1903 to July 1904).

fill the place of the stricken governor. Abdulrahman Hassan Sami Bey was described as "scholarly, honest, active," and "if properly backed by Constantinople, he should be able to accomplish much." By the end of September, a new district attorney had announced that there was no evidence warranting indictment of most of the prisoners; at the same time he summarily removed two judges who had indicted the thirty-five and pressed charges in Constantinople against the two. The trial, however, dragged on, and it was not until February 13, 1904, that a verdict was announced: twenty-eight of the accused, including Tenekejian, were acquitted, but it was not until April, ten months after his arrest, that the professor was freed.[39] That the forces for justice and reform were not to prevail for long became clear when in January 1905 the energetic governor Abdulrahman Hassan Sami Bey was removed in a step that, according to one American observer, "marks the downfall of the progressive and enlightened element in the district and victory of the fanatical party."[40]

Two trips taken by Consul Norton provide interesting insights into conditions in the Ottoman Empire at the time and attitudes of Armenians. The first trip occurred in 1904 soon after the trial had come to an end, when Norton received instructions from Washington to undertake an unusual inspection tour to the nearby areas of Mush, Bitlis, and Van, where massacres or threatened massacres against the Armenian population had been reported.[41] The Mush-Sasun district had again been the scene of massacres in 1904, resulting in the death of Armenians variously estimated at 2,000 (British Consul Tyrrell), 3,500 (Norton and most consular officials and

---

[39] Despatches from Harput, no. 117, April 1, 1904.

[40] Notes by Ernest W. Riggs, missionary and acting U.S. Consul in Kharpert during Norton's absence in Iran, dated January 26, 1905, in US Archives, RG 84, C41 (C8.1), Letters Received and Sent (Harput, July 1904 to May 1905), p. 351. Both the U.S. government and the missionary board frowned upon the appointment of missionaries to diplomatic posts, a practice that was followed rarely and only for brief periods.

[41] Norton received instructions on July 7, 1904. See Despatches from Harput, no. 128. In Constantinople, objections to the trip were made by the grand vizier to U.S. Minister John G.A. Leishman on the grounds that Consul Norton had no business in Van or Bitlis (which were not in his consular district). Leishman was informed by Washington that Norton's trip had been authorized "for the purpose of gathering information regarding the reported massacres of the Armenians and whether American missionaries are in danger there." See *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1904* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), p. 837.

missionaries in the region), and 7,833 (the local Armenian bishop, who included in this figure the deaths caused by starvation or exposure as a result of the massacre). According to Norton, the population in Mush was "terror-stricken and subject to daily persecution and maltreatment." There was a need to aid 15,000 refugees. Once again, American missionaries embarked on a campaign to raise funds for relief. The situation had stabilized by the time Norton arrived, and the area was heavily guarded. He stated that "it is not likely massacres will occur there . . . unless openly or tacitly permitted by the Constantinople authorities." An element of danger, however, was present in the fact that the troops, especially those from Van, were not under very strict discipline and had mutinied the previous year because of non-payment of wages.[42]

Norton then proceeded to Bitlis, where the Americans had a small but important mission, including the so-called "Mount Holyoke Seminary," established by the two Ely sisters, Charlotte and Mary Ann. Welcomed as the first United States consular official to visit, Norton found the situation calm. (Bitlis and Van were technically under the jurisdiction of the American consul in Erzerum, but that official had apparently never ventured into the area.) He then went on to Van, taking the circuitous route around the northern perimeter of the lake. He was present during an outbreak of violence by Armenian revolutionaries five days later, on August 31, when he hastened to raise the American flag over the mission—something the Turkish authorities did not allow unless a United States consular official was present. The crisis in Van abated through the mediating efforts of the medical missionary Dr. Clarence Ussher. Peace was restored, but the atmosphere remained that of a "dormant volcano."[43]

Norton was not sympathetic to the Armenian revolutionaries, reporting that the typical mode of operation in these remote areas was to engage a Turkish force and then retreat to a village, pursued by the Turks, who would brutally punish the village while the revolu-

---

[42] Despatches from Harput, no. 131, Aug. 3, 1904. Norton wrote: "I am touched, at this remote point of the interior of Asia, to see how the general sentiment trusts and confides more in the friendship and philanthropic impulse of the American people, than in the help to be expected from all European nations combined."

[43] Despatches from Harput, no. 132, Bitlis, Aug. 2, 1904; no. 133, Van, Sept. 5, 1904; no. 134, Harput, Sept. 26, 1904.

tionaries fled to the nearby hills. In this way a small group could achieve maximum disturbances. The toll on the population in these eastern districts was serious, as the arbitrariness and clumsiness of the Turkish officers was well known.[44]

While in Van, Norton was in touch with the Armenian revolutionary leaders Kevork Chavush and Andranik, who on behalf of the "Armenian Revolutionary Alliance and Union: Central Committee of Sassun" passed to him a list of 85 grievances, written in red, which "gave a somewhat sanguinary appearance." Norton described the grievances—which called for security of citizens, tax reform, and equal justice—as being on the whole well founded. The suggested reforms would contribute to the general welfare of the population without interfering with the integrity of the Ottoman Empire or with loyalty to the sultan, he reasoned. The demand for a Christian governor for the six Armenian provinces, acting under the supervision of the European powers, might in some ways present a problem, he noted, because of the geographic dispersion of the Armenian population.[45]

Norton's second trip offered him the opportunity to become the first American official to visit the Holy See at Echmiadzin, seat of the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church. A special assignment, lying outside his consular responsibilities, took Norton to Tabriz in Iran, in connection with the investigation of the murder of an American missionary in Urumia (Urmia). On his return trip, in the spring of 1905, he made it a point to stop in Echmiadzin, where he was warmly received. Norton made it clear to his hosts that his visit was not an official one but had resulted from "the curiosity of a passing traveler." He later reported that, as a graduate of a German university, he had been cordially welcomed by the ecclesiastical staff of about twenty-five, the leading members of which had also been

---

[44] Despatches from Harput, no. 136, Oct. 13, 1904. For example, after visiting Van and its famed church located on the island of Aghtamar, Norton reported that the Armenian revolutionaries had fled to the island, followed in pursuit by the Turkish military, who fired in their direction only to discover that the Armenians had escaped. The common assessment of the accuracy of the Turkish military was expressed by an Armenian monk, who explained to Norton that the Turkish artillery had missed hitting the Armenian church only because of "the fact that they had been aiming directly at it."

[45] Ibid., no. 136, Oct. 13, 1904, encl. 20.

trained in German universities—unlike the higher Armenian clergy in the Ottoman Empire, who tended to speak French rather than German. The Norton visit came at a time when the Supreme Patriarch or the Catholicos (not mentioned by name but who was Mkrtich Khrimian "Hayrik") and his suite were extremely dejected over the situation of the Armenians both in the Russian and the Ottoman empires. "They have lost all hope of any effective intervention by the European powers on behalf of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire." In Russia, they had just received news of the massacre of Armenians in Baku. The Armenian Church in the Russian Empire had been "deprived of all control over the real estate of the church and was receiving only a fraction of income of landed property to run schools and ecclesiastical establishments." Norton added that there was the sentiment among both Turkish Armenians and Russian Armenians "that efforts of the most desperate character were fully warranted."[46]

The Catholicos was enough of a diplomat to convey "his deep gratitude for the sympathy and generosity of Americans, in connection with the relief of the distress resultant upon the massacres of 1895 and 1904." His Holiness went on to voice the earnest hope for "some action on the part of the American government to relieve the situation, although recognizing fully that the problem was one falling outside of the recognized sphere of our political activity."[47]

The political reports submitted by the Kharpert consuls in later years provide useful insights into such issues as the local effects of the seizure of power in Constantinople in 1908 by the Committee of Union and Progress or Young Turks. For example, Consul Masterson reported in December of that year, five months after the Young Turks had restored the Ottoman Constitution, that on the local scene "there are seemingly no tangible results under the new regime" and that "the Turks and Armenians are drifting each day farther apart." He continued:

> The Turks of this community are suspicious of the Committee of Union and Progress and within the past week have organized another

---

[46] Ibid., no. 154, May 23, 1905. Norton expressed doubt that the church in any way provided material support for the revolutionary movement.

[47] Ibid.

> society (secret) called the Committee of Islamism (Jemiyeti Islamiye) of some two hundred members whose sole purpose seems to be to discredit the Committee of Union and Progress, while the Armenians on their side are loudly complaining that the promised reforms have not come, that their liberties are all promises and that they have no hand in the new movement.
>
> The Armenians too have lately organized several societies among themselves, and are holding meetings for the discussion of political subjects to which the Turks are not invited and these meetings, however innocent they may be upon their face, serve to arouse the suspicions of the Moslems and keep them in a continual state of foment.

Up to this point, Masterson noted, no representative from the capital had appeared in Kharpert to explain the new government and its programs:

> A few days ago however a member of the Committee of Union and Progress from Saloniki has arrived, but unfortunately, he is in poor health and so far has done nothing, but it is hoped that shortly he will be able to help these people to understand the true state of affairs . . . but one man in an interior community like this, filled with reactionaries and malcontents of all kinds, has a hopeless task almost.[48]

A few months later, in June 1909, Masterson reported that local conditions were even more tense in the aftermath of the Cilician massacres. The grisly accounts of the bloodshed in Adana had been related to the local population by 150 natives of Kharpert "who have come back, nearer dead than alive through flight" and who have been "detailing at great length the horrors of the massacre in Adana, Tarsus and Marash." Indeed Masterson credited the local governor for preventing similar violence in Kharpert. "I have it on the highest authority, from a source that cannot be questioned," he wrote, that the governor, Ali Nurset Pasha, had received a telegram on April 23 ordering a massacre on that day "or as soon thereafter as word could be communicated to the people." Over the next three days, "the

---

[48] Masterson (Harput) to Leishman (Constantinople), RG 59, 10044/121-122, Despatch no. 145, Dec. 23, 1908, microcopy 862, roll 717). From 1906 to 1910 the State Department adopted the cumbersome Numerical File system for all diplomatic and consular correspondence. In 1910 this was replaced by the Decimal File system.

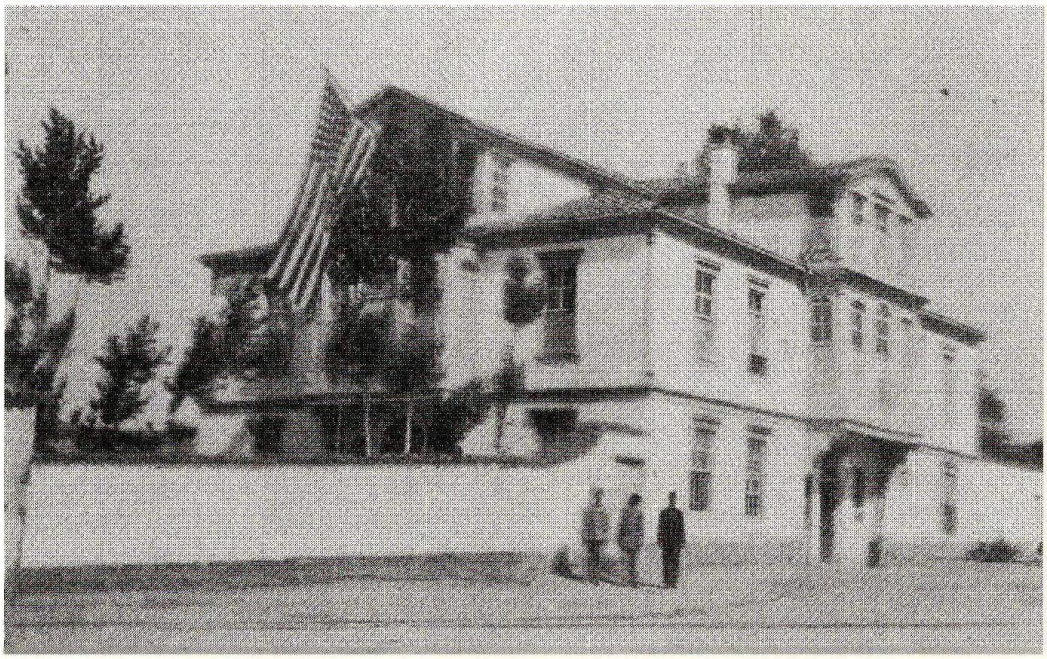
reactionaries and Kurds were crowding into the town, arming themselves." On the fourth day, the vali received a message from the army commander in Erzinjan, instructing him to disobey any message calling for a massacre and holding him personally responsible for any violence. On the following day, word was received of the deposing of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II and of the accession of his successor, "when the tension was released and the strain subsided." Masterson concluded: "During those four days, however, the suspense was terrible, the Christian community was expecting a massacre at any time and the greatest excitement and confusion prevailed and there is no question but for the heroic silence preserved by this one man the storm would have burst."[49]

Any hope for an improvement in living conditions resulting from the new government in Constantinople was dashed when the Tripoli war broke out between the Ottoman Empire and Italy in 1911 and economic conditions in Kharpert deteriorated. Conservatives continued to dominate the political scene. Consul Masterson estimated "that 999 out of every 1,000 Turks in this part of the Empire are at heart reactionaries and are not in sympathy with the regime in power in Constantinople." An example of that reactionary spirit and its effects on U.S. interests was demonstrated when one of the three deputies from Mezre, while giving a speech in the House of Deputies in Constantinople, had opposed most bitterly and successfully the proposed grant of a franchise to American investors for a railroad through the district. He argued that "the Moslems of his district did not want the road for the reason that it would simply benefit the Armenian community and for that reason he and his colleagues were opposed to the building of the railroad." Masterson had frequently pointed out that the lack of transport facilities was a major cause for the economic stagnation in the region, and this opposition to the railroad reinforced his pessimism about future prospects in the district.[50]

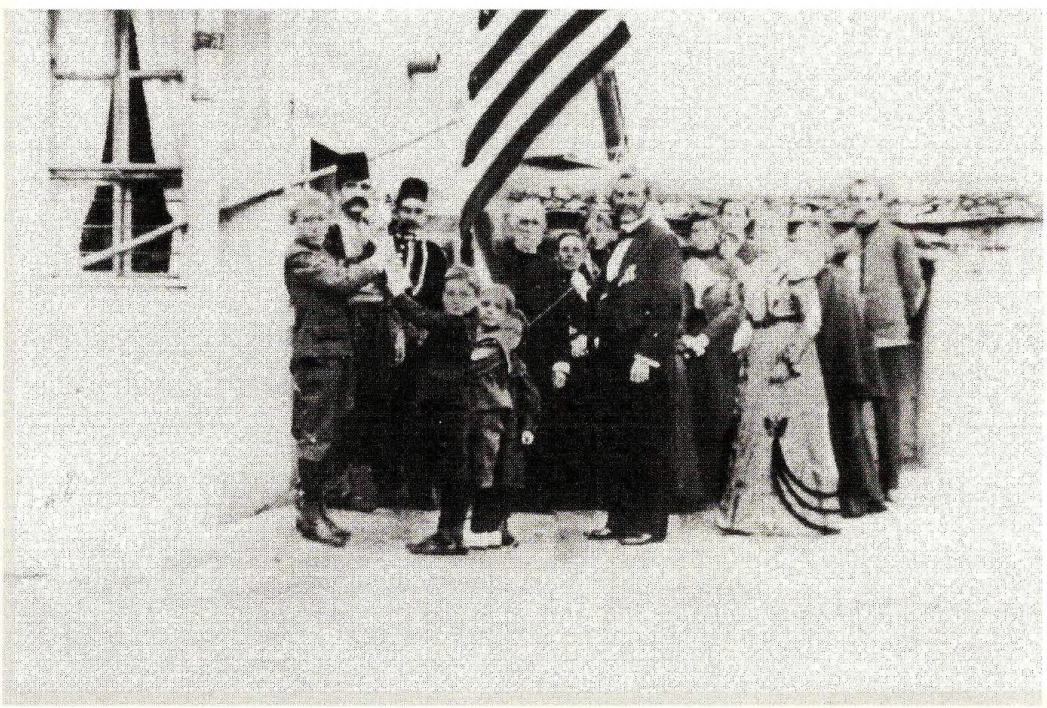
---

[49] RG 59, 10044/254-255 (no. 215, May 5, 1909), and 10044/321-322 (no. 270, June 11, 1909) (microcopy 862, roll 718).

[50] "Annual Trade Report for 1913."



United States Consulate in Mezre

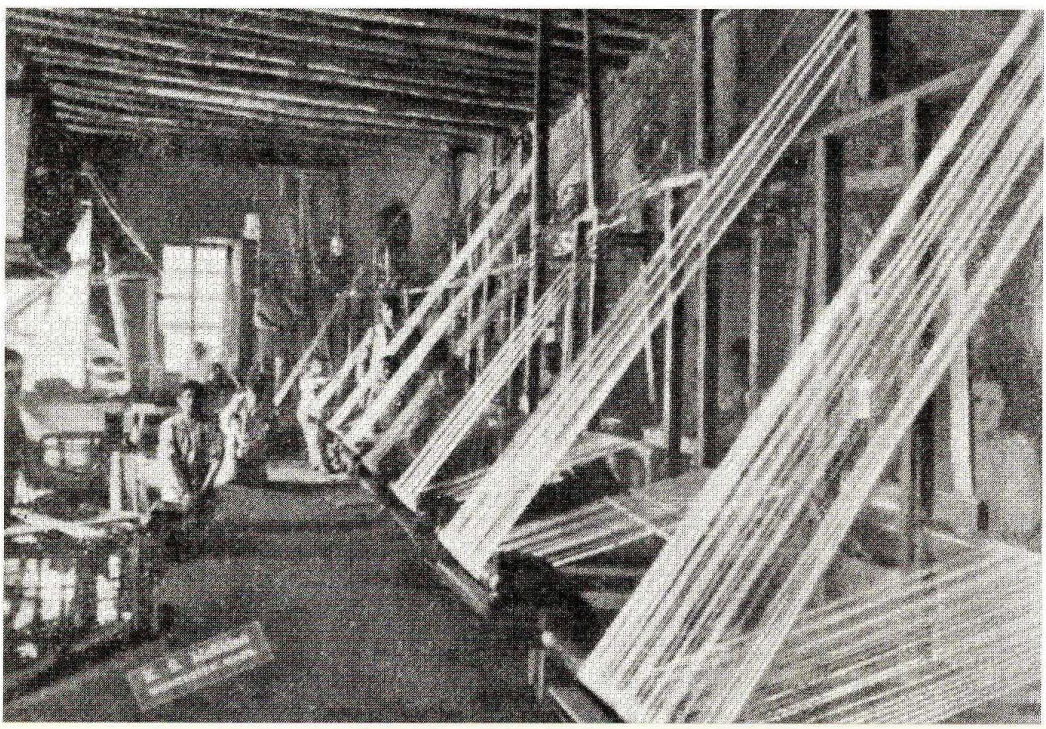


Consul Thomas Norton and American Missionary Children Raising the Stars and Stripes, November1901

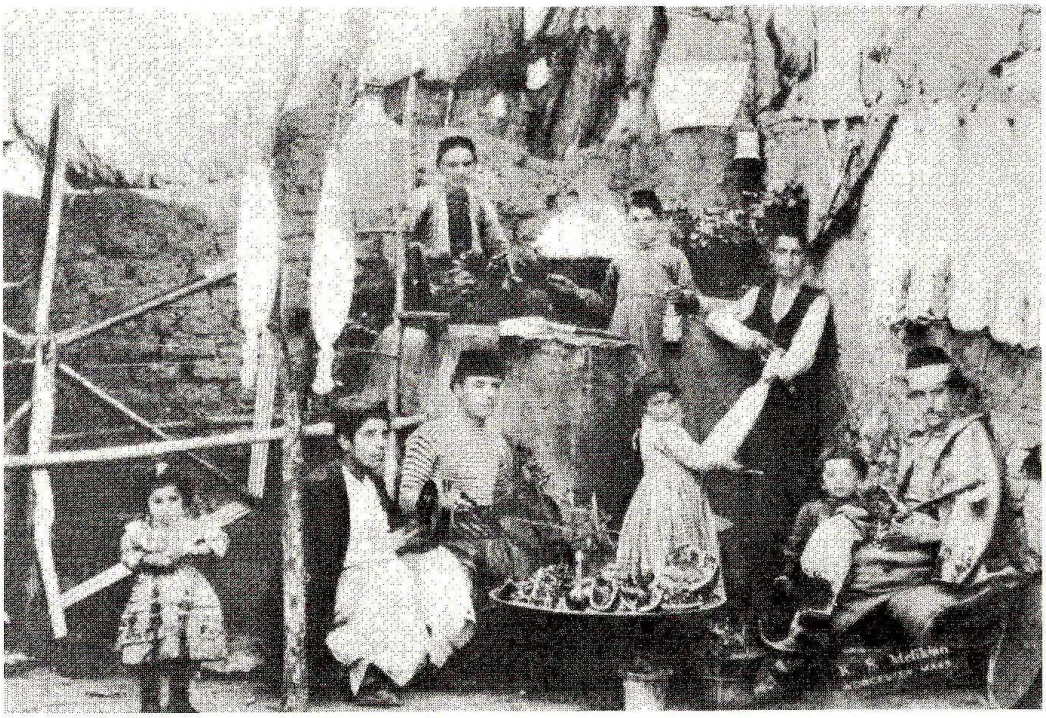
Consul Evan Young with Catholicos of Cilicia, Sahag Khabayan (Native of Egheki), and Heads of Christian Denominations of Kharpert, 1906

Consul William Masterson Hosting Thanksgiving Dinner, 1913
Middle Row (3rd and 5th from left): Tacy Atkinson and Maria Jacobsen
Back Row (from left): Henry Riggs, Herbert Atkinson, Consul Masterson, Reverend George Knapp

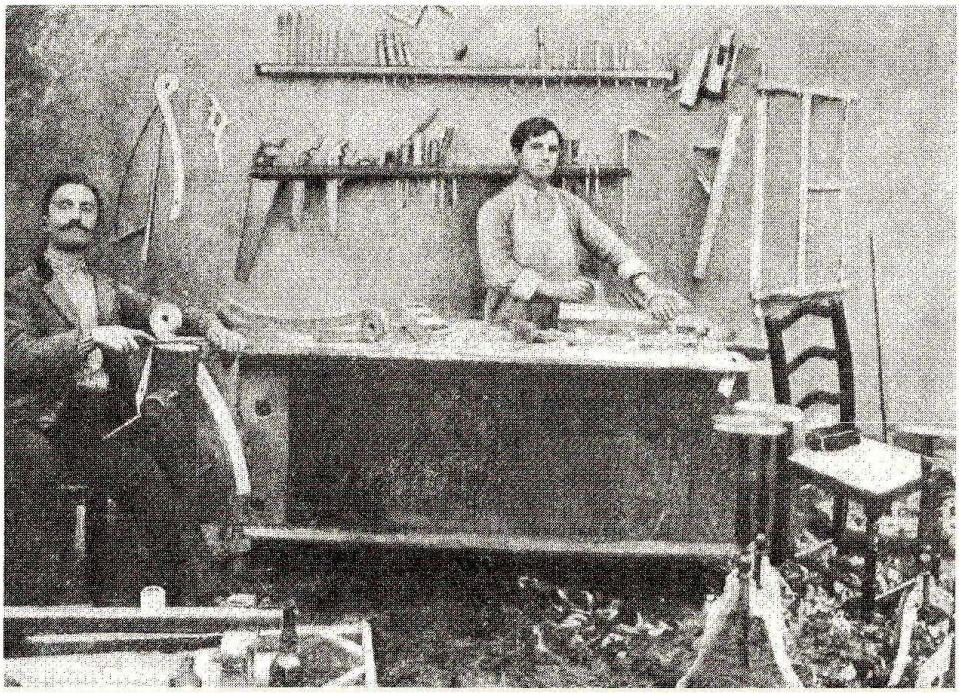
Consul Leslie A. Davis (center)

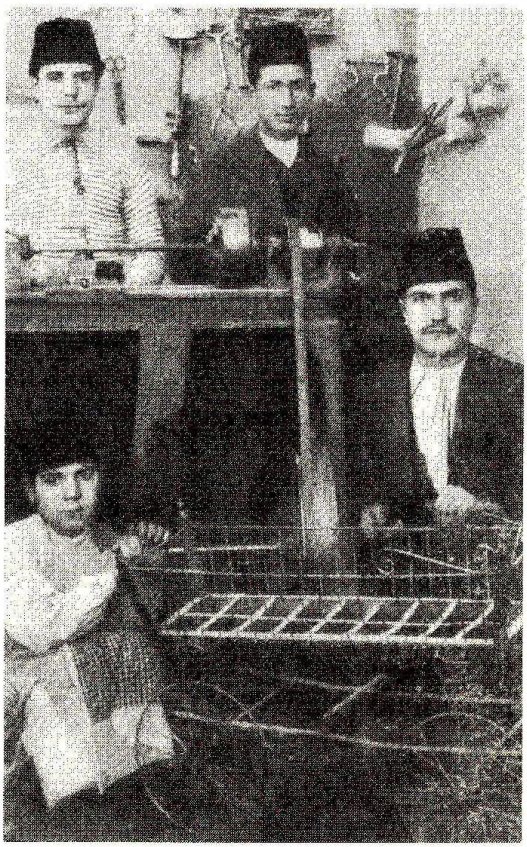


Mezre: Rug Weaver and Textile Works



Mezre: Silk Thread Drawers and Shoemakers





Mezre: Carpentry Workshop and Metal Smiths

World War I and the Armenian Genocide

The outbreak of war in the summer of 1914 completely transformed the position of the United States Consulate in Kharpert, especially as the Turkish government began to unleash the tremendous destructive force of what became the Armenian Genocide. Of primary concern to the new consul, Leslie A. Davis, during this time was the safety and security of 72 American missionaries serving within the consular district. They had initially rejected the advice from Washington to return home or at least to relocate to larger population centers situated near the coast.[51] The consul's efforts to protect those Armenians who had migrated to America, become naturalized U.S. citizens, and returned to Turkey, as well as the local families of naturalized Armenians living in the United States, were made difficult because of the Turkish government's refusal to recognize the U.S. citizenship of naturalized Armenians. Davis also sought to keep his superiors in Constantinople and Washington informed of the conditions in the district. In the process, he became a unique source of information about the events taking place in the province, in particular about the Armenian population's fate which constituted, in the consul's words, "probably the most terrible tragedy that has ever befallen any people in the history of the world."[52]

The wartime situation, combined with the extraordinary conditions accompanying Turkey's campaign against its Armenian population, ruptured communications between Kharpert and the outside

---

[51] A circular telegram to this effect had been issued by the State Department to all embassies and missions in Europe on August 1, 1914. On December 20, Secretary of State William J. Bryan telegraphed to Ambassador Henry Morgenthau in Constantinople: "The President approves the suggestion that Americans should be advised to leave Turkey wherever you think it would be unsafe for them to remain, but he suggests that to avoid frightening friends in this country and attracting public attention, it is better to handle the matter very guardedly and confidentially." Morgenthau replied that the response of the missionaries had been that "they will not desert their people in time of stress and danger"and that to abandon their missions "would likely cause panic among the people and would jeopardize properties which would be left without protection and terminate most disastrously the splendid work achieved through ninety years of patient labor." See *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914, Supplement* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1928), pp. 721, 777-79.

[52] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, p. 40.

world, leaving the consulate more isolated than ever. The tragedy unfolding before his eyes demanded action of some kind, yet Davis often did not receive instructions or was unable for various reasons to carry them out. While local officials were overtly polite and cordial, they routinely ignored the consul's requests and rarely told him the entire truth. His sphere of action was reduced to individual acts of kindness—which probably saved hundreds of Armenian lives—and to recording for posterity the events unfolding before his eyes. The consul's eyewitness reports on the Armenian Genocide assume added importance when one considers the fact that almost all of the Armenians deported from their homes in the eastern provinces were funneled through Kharpert, to die in the notorious camps hastily set up in the region, or to be trapped and brutally murdered in the nearby isolated valleys surrounded by steep mountains, or to be herded farther south to perish in the relentless heat of the barren desert. Thus, the consul witnessed the fate not only of the Armenians living in Kharpert province but also of those deported from the areas of Erzerum, Erzinjan, Bitlis, and Diarbekir, many of whom managed to survive days and weeks of hunger and deprivation en route only to meet death in Kharpert. It was for this reason that he coined the phrase "slaughterhouse vilayet" to describe his post.

None of this was evident when Leslie Davis assumed his office in Kharpert in late May 1914. He participated in the usual consular duties, such as the presenting diplomas to the graduates of Euphrates College in impressive ceremonies attended by ranking local Turkish officials, who appeared most agreeable in their conversations with the consul, the American missionaries, and the Armenian parents, teachers, and students of the college. Like his predecessors, Davis was struck by the economic potential of the area, particularly now that the railroad was scheduled to be built, opening up the region to expanded trade opportunities. Davis was a relative newcomer to the consular service, Kharpert being his second assignment, and he arrived directly from Batum, in the Russian Empire, where he had completed a two-year tour. After a few weeks in Kharpert, the consul left for a home furlough to visit his ailing father, and to bring back with him his bride, whom he had married in 1912. Taking the southern route, Davis reached only as far as Cairo, when because of the outbreak of war in Europe he was instructed to return immediately

to Kharpert, where he remained for the following three years.[53]

The problems began soon enough. On October 1, 1914, emboldened by the outbreak of war and encouraged by its German ally, the Turkish government abolished the Capitulations, the corpus of regulations which had protected the legal status of foreign institutions and personnel over the previous four centuries. Along with the Allied (Entente) Powers, the United States protested this unilateral abrogation of the conditions under which foreign institutions operated in the Ottoman Empire.[54] The protests were brushed aside by the Turkish government, which nonetheless did not issue any new rules or guidelines for foreign institutions and personnel, thus leaving the entire matter open to question. The interpretation offered by local officials in Kharpert seems to have been that all rights of foreigners in Turkey were abolished. When Consul Davis went to pay an official visit to the newly appointed vali of Kharpert, Sabit Bey, he found the Turkish official "somewhat arrogant and greatly elated over the recent abrogation of the Capitulations." The vali "began at once to chuckle about it" and wondered aloud how the U.S. consul would occupy himself, as there would be no further work. Davis answered that "if there were no work it would be much easier for me."[55] The light tone masked the deadly seriousness of the situation. The head of the American mission in Kharpert, Henry H. Riggs, who had been present at this meeting, later wrote that "the vali seemed to assume that the abrogation of the Capitulations practically abrogated the office of consul, while at the same time he assumed that Americans no longer had any rights that Turks were bound to respect." Riggs continued:

> In the course of the next few weeks, when American life and property were frequently in the balance, we learned very definitely that the Vali resented any interference by so much as a word of the

---

[53] Ibid., pp. 34-40.

[54] See, for example, the telegram from Bryan to Morgenthau on September 16, 1914, six days after Turkey announced its intention to abrogate the Capitulations, stating that the United States "does not acquiesce" and "does not recognize" the right of the Ottoman government to take this action. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States, 1914* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 1093.

[55] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province,* pp. 40-41.

> consul in behalf of American interests. And we found that the only way to secure any of our rights was to let the consul keep in the background, and to appear ourselves, through the mediation usually of some friendly Ottoman, as petitioners to the gracious generosity of the Governor. There were many things that we could not conscientiously put on such grounds, and so we had to forgo what the government no longer granted us as a right.[56]

The Turkish government's hostile attitude toward American institutions continued despite missionary actions to cooperate in the war effort in the early months, while the United States remained a neutral power. As soon as mobilization was ordered, in August 1914, Dr. Henry Herbert Atkinson, director of the Annie Tracy Riggs Hospital in Mezre, offered to make beds and services available to the Turkish military, and the facility soon became filled to capacity with sick soldiers and later with the wounded. Following Turkey's entry into the war in October 1914, the Constantinople chapter of the American Red Cross, in a gesture of good will, offered to support the care of Turkish soldiers in American missionary hospitals. For the next fifteen months, Red Cross funds paid for the care of about 100 soldiers in Dr. Atkinson's hospital, where they received superior medical services.[57] None of these cooperative gestures, however, deterred local officials from their determination to assert their absolute mastery of the situation by gradually taking possession of all of the facilities in Kharpert belonging to the American missionaries, who had constructed some of the finest buildings in the area.

It did not take long for a confrontation to develop. When the first requests came from Turkish authorities to take over American facilities, the Americans cooperated by voluntarily turning over one of their detached buildings, called Audience Hall, to the military for the housing of soldiers. Before Audience Hall was filled to capacity, increasingly insistent requests were received for the use of other missionary buildings, specifically the Theological Seminary and Girls'

---

[56] Henry H. Riggs, *Days of Tragedy in Armenia: Personal Experiences in Harpoot, 1915-1917* (Ann Arbor: Gomidas Institute, 1997), p. 33.

[57] Ibid., pp. 19-20. Thirteen American hospitals in Turkey made beds available to the Turkish military through the auspices of the Red Cross. See Morgenthau to Secretary of State, Dec. 22, 1914, in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914, Supplement*, pp. 778-79.

Primary School. The missionaries protested on grounds that the military was not fully utilizing the building already occupied and that the use of these structures was integral to the missionary programs. Finally the missionaries conceded these two additional buildings with the understanding that no others would be demanded. But it soon became evident that Turkish officials would not stop until they had occupied all the properties. When the Americans protested that they could not continue their schools unless they kept possession of their buildings, the authorities responded by ordering the schools closed. A showdown came in March 1915, when the government again demanded the remaining missionary buildings. Consul Davis went to the vali to ask him to wait for instructions from Constantinople. "In my interview with him he was more arrogant than he had ever been at any time," Davis later recalled, "and informed me that, although he was glad to see me personally about any matter, he did not receive me officially, as consuls had no official standing in Turkey since the abrogation of the Capitulations."[58]

Henry Riggs has described the resulting confrontation:

> The Chief of Police called the president of the college [at the time Ernest Riggs, Henry's brother] and notified him that if the buildings were not voluntarily surrendered by ten o'clock the next morning, he would come and empty them by force. . . . We conferred with the consul and, according to orders received from the embassy, decided that we would not submit voluntarily. Before ten o'clock the next morning he came up to the college. But the police arrived just as he did. Prolonging the customary coffee-drinking, the president kept the police in his office while the consul put the United States seal on the college doors. The consul then came in and explained to the Chief of Police that the question of the closing of the college and the seizure of the buildings had been referred to Constantinople—that until orders came from there we could not surrender our buildings. And that therefore he had put the U.S. seal on the doors, and forbade their taking the buildings till the orders came from Constantinople to that effect. The Chief of Police was taken aback, though not at all deferential. . . . He went off without disturbing the seals, and we thought that for the time being we had carried our point. We were doomed to disappointment, however, for in the course of an hour or

[58] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, p. 47.

> so the Chief of Police returned with a force of men, and summoning me to witness his deed, he broke the seals and entered the building, saying as he did so, that he was acting on orders from the Vali.[59]

This incident provided a dramatic affirmation of the powerlessness of the U.S. consul, and the missionaries recognized the futility of appealing for his assistance in the difficult days to follow. The missionary presence in Kharpert was reduced to the Girls' College building. In the words of the Swedish missionary Alma Johansson: "It was useless to protest to the vali, the American consul at Kharpert protested several times but the vali treats him like 'air' and in a most shameful manner."[60] Davis for his part no longer made official demands on the government. From this experience he concluded:

> There can be no question about the incorrectness of the Vali's attitude in regard to the status of consuls, but I learned a lesson in diplomacy at that time which stood me in good stead in dealing with Turkish officials during the remainder of my stay in Harput, for I do not think that I ever again asked anything of any official as a matter of right. Thereafter I based every request that I ever made upon personal grounds and ignored entirely the question of official rights. The slight coolness that resulted from this clash between the Vali and myself did not amount to much. It soon passed away and during the two years that followed there were no further incidents of the kind, but the Vali and I became very good personal friends and remained such in spite of all that happened.[61]

The difficulties of Consul Davis' position were compounded by the increasing obstacles placed in the way of his communications with the outside world, even with the United States Embassy in the Ottoman capital. No sooner had Turkey entered the war than restrictions were placed on diplomatic correspondence. On November 10, 1914, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan instructed Ambassador Morgenthau to protest the refusal of the Turkish post office to accept official mail under seal. Morgenthau replied two days later

---

[59] Riggs, *Days of Tragedy*, p. 35.

[60] Morgenthau to Secretary of State, Oct. 9, 1915, encl. 1, "Report of an Eye-Witness," RG 59, 867/4016.226 (microcopy 353, roll 44). Alma Johansson (Johannsen) worked in the German mission.

[61] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, p. 47.

that he had made arrangements with the Ministry of War to permit sealed correspondence between the embassy and consulates.[62] These arrangements were far from firm, however, and Davis could never be certain whether his dispatches and reports were reaching their intended destinations. After February 1916 all official mail of the consulate, even when addressed to the State Department or the U.S. Embassy in Constantinople, had to be delivered unsealed to the post office, to be read and censored by Turkish military authorities before being sent out.[63] Irregularities in communication with Constantinople, Davis later wrote, were among his "chief difficulties," finally "becoming worse and worse and seriously interfering with the work of the office."[64] Nonetheless he managed to find ingenious ways to exchange some information with the outside world.

Despite the limitations placed on his ability to conduct the business of the consulate, Davis determined to make the best of a difficult situation by doing what he could under the circumstances. One of his most important services was to provide firsthand accounts of the events taking place in Kharpert during his three-year tenure. Today, his reports constitute one of the most complete and compelling eyewitness testimonies of the treatment of the Armenians in the eastern provinces during World War I. Not only was Davis in a unique position to observe the course of events, but he also exhibited a keen understanding of their significance in the broader scale of events, unlike the missionaries, who often engaged in wishful thinking. His messages took on added significance later, when he returned to the United States and produced a full report. The immediate usefulness of his dispatches from Kharpert was limited in two respects. First, the events he was describing were so horrible, so unprecedented, that they were sometimes discounted by his superiors in the State Department (this Davis learned only after his return to Washington).[65] Second, many of his dispatches never reached their

---

[62] The exchange between Bryan and Morgenthau on this subject on November 10 and 12, 1914, is in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914, Supplement*, pp. 540-41.

[63] On this subject, see the report filed on March 4, 1918, in the United States by American Consul Jesse B. Jackson of Aleppo, RG 59, 867.4016/373, pp. 21-22, (microcopy 353, roll 46).

[64] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, p. 45.

[65] Ibid., p. 54.

destination, or they arrived months later. A good example is the lengthy report Davis penned on June 30, 1915, two days after the provincial government officially announced what had been rumored for weeks: its intention to deport the entire Armenian population of Kharpert province. Davis immediately understood the implication of the government's actions, and his dispatch, describing in a nutshell the method and the significance of the Turkish government's deportation of its Armenian population, is surely one of the most remarkable in State Department annals. Davis wrote:

> The full meaning of such an order can scarcely be imagined by those who are not familiar with the peculiar conditions of this isolated region. A massacre, however horrible the word may sound, would be humane in comparison with it. In a massacre many escape but a wholesale deportation of this kind in this country means a lingering and perhaps even more dreadful death for nearly everyone. I do not believe it possible for one in [a] hundred to survive, perhaps not one in [a] thousand.[66]

This original alarm never reached its intended recipients, the U.S. Embassy in Constantinople and the State Department in Washington. When Davis belatedly realized that the dispatch had been lost, he provided the embassy with a copy which was forwarded to Washington on February 17, 1916, and reached the State Department only on March 16 of that year, almost nine months after it had been written.[67] A series of messages followed, describing the course of events affecting the Armenian population, including the torture and disappearance of able-bodied men, the harsh measures used for the deportation of families, the desperate condition of the deportees arriving from the north, the misery of the local refugee camps, the growing emptiness of nearby Armenian villages, and all the horrors of the Armenian Genocide. Though his reports were very candid about the barbarous campaign being waged against the Armenians,

---

[66] Davis to Morgenthau, June 30, 1915, p. 3, encl. in Hoffman Philip, Chargé d'Affaires, to Secretary of State, Feb. 17, 1916, RG 59, 867.4016/269 (microcopy 353, roll 44). This dispatch also enclosed copies of reports from Davis to Morgenthau dated July 24, 1915, and December 30, 1915, reprinted in *Slaughterhouse Province*, Appendix A.

[67] Ibid.

there were some things that Davis did not dare to write down. In cipher at the end of one of his dispatches, he reported that he had made two trips to the lake about five hours away, "where I saw the dead bodies of fully ten thousand persons, many of whom had been recently killed."[68] Davis considered it imprudent to include his description of the treacherous landscape surrounding the lake, with steep mountains and isolated ravines, and his careful reconstruction of the way the Armenians must have been murdered there; that report was made only upon his return to the United States. His reports, supplemented by missionary accounts and survivor memoirs, provide a comprehensive account of what took place in Kharpert province during those days.

Davis was among the first to call attention to the need for the organization of massive relief measures by the West to aid the Armenians. His urgent telegram to this effect was sent to Morgenthau the day after the announcement of the deportations in Kharpert and reached its destination.[69] It was probably a major factor in Ambassador Morgenthau's enthusiastic and successful embrace of the idea, which resulted in a sequence of relief organizations culminating in the Near East Relief. During the discouraging days that followed, Davis sometimes downplayed the aid campaign and wondered whether any Armenians would be left alive to benefit, and even if they survived, whether the government would permit the distribution of aid. For example, the authorities had been adamant in insisting that no orphanages could operate under foreign auspices, asserting that the Turkish government was establishing its own orphanages to meet the need.[70]

The refusal of the Turkish government to recognize fully the consul's official position did not deter Davis from innumerable attempts to obtain relief for the Armenians. On the eve of the deportation, a group of six Westerners, "comprising practically the entire foreign male population of the town," called upon the vali "unofficially" in a vain attempt to mitigate the harshness of the order by delaying the date of deportation, exempting the elderly and the

---

[68] Ibid., Report of December 30, 1915, p. 12.

[69] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, p. 53.

[70] Report, Davis to Morgenthau, July 11, 1915, p. 7, encl. in Morgenthau to Secretary of State, Aug. 10, 1915, RG 59, 867.4016/122 (microcopy 353, roll 43).

feeble, and allowing some of the missionaries to accompany the deported Armenians. The group included, in addition to Davis, German missionary Johannes Ehmann, Austrian vice director of the local branch of the Ottoman Bank, Charles Picciotto, and missionaries Henry Riggs, Ernest Riggs, and Henry Atkinson. This and all similar appeals were firmly rejected by Sabit Bey. The only concession the governor would make was to allow the foreigners to purchase or to receive valuables from the deported people for safekeeping (valuables he was later to demand be turned over to him).[71]

The efforts by Davis to save those Armenians who were naturalized citizens of the United States, or the wives and children of such citizens, continued to meet with a negative response from the authorities. The vali claimed he had received no instructions that they should be exempted from the general deportation. Although Davis was successful in obtaining exception orders (*vesikas*) in a few cases involving naturalized Armenians, he soon discovered that the papers were ignored by relentless Turkish officials.[72]

These extraordinary circumstances found Davis performing unusual tasks. Dr. Atkinson one day discovered at the missionary hospital several revolvers and a large number of cartridges among the effects of an Armenian boy who had been in his employ and feared that discovery of the arms by Turkish officials would create problems. The next day Davis, accompanied by Euphrates College President Ernest Riggs, went to the hospital, collected the firearms, and then buried them in "a lonely place" in the nearby mountains. This "unusual" task for a consul and a college president was full of danger. Davis later explained: "Had we been observed and the affair become known to the Turkish authorities the consequences might have been serious for all the Americans. Yet I thought it much better to take a chance in this way than to risk having the authorities find this ammunition on the premises of the Americans, should they search there."[73]

Finding it impossible to obtain any special consideration for

---

[71] Report, Davis to Morgenthau, June 30, 1915, p. 8. Riggs also described this meeting in *Days of Tragedy*, pp. 80-83.

[72] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, p. 53; Report, Davis to Morgenthau, July 24, 1915, p. 14.

[73] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, pp. 48-49.

Armenians who were naturalized U.S. citizens or relatives of U.S. citizens, Davis began quietly to help individuals, initially by providing the consulate as a place of refuge, where many Armenians were hidden. The effort began with persons who had ties to U.S. citizens (though few of them had documentation) and gradually expanded. The physical characteristics of the consulate were propitious for the plan. An impressive building of three stories, the consulate was surrounded by a very high wall and had a large garden with big trees. In the warm, dry summer time it was possible for forty people to sleep out of doors under the trees, hidden from sight. During the day women and children stayed in sheltered corners of the garden, the children forbidden to make any noise and the men remaining hidden in the attic of the building. If the housing of these people was relatively easy, although dangerous, feeding them was a serious problem. Purchasing food had to be done very quietly in order not to arouse attention. As the terror eased a bit, Davis arranged to shelter some of these Armenians in nearby houses. After a time, the consul found so many Armenians under his care that he decided to organize some kind of a school for the children. One of the hidden Armenians, Mr. Pekmezian, supervised the work, while a number of others gave English lessons or provided instruction in Armenian. The school was carried on for about a year on the third floor of the consulate. "I presume that not many Consulates have conducted a school, but the situation at Harput was extraordinary in many respects," Davis later commented.[74]

Another service Davis was able to provide was the storage of valuables entrusted to him by Armenians, and the distribution of funds sent from relatives in the United States. Now the one concession made by the governor to the foreign colony was put to good use: permission to safeguard valuables given to them by the deported. People began bringing money, jewels, valuable documents, and articles of all kinds to the consulate and to the missionaries. At first Davis accepted insurance policies and other documents, while sending persons with money to the missionaries. But since the missionaries had no good place to store money, most of it was brought to the safe at the consulate. At one point Davis estimated that as much as $200,000 in gold was stored in his safe, a source of grave concern

[74] Ibid., pp. 64-69, 109, 115.

over what would happen should the premises suddenly be raided. In the fall of 1915, the vali demanded that the consulate turn over to the government all property left by the deported Armenians, but Davis ignored the order. As he explained, the government had established a special Commission for Abandoned Goods, whose ostensible purpose was to take charge of the property of the deported Armenians, guarding it in their absence and forwarding the balance to them in their new homes or once they had returned. The commission, however, never paid out anything. "After it had gotten possession of hundreds of thousands of dollars, it conveniently lost its books and explained that, as all the money received had been used up for expenses and there were no funds on hand, there was no necessity anyway of rendering any account!"[75]

Following the major waves of deportations in July 1915, Davis began to receive appeals from Armenians who had managed to survive and were absolutely destitute. Many had relatives in the United States with whom they wished to communicate and from whom they sought assistance. From then on Davis spent a great deal of time and energy in trying to get word out to these relatives about their families in Turkey. At first he was able to enclose letters in his dispatches, twenty to thirty at a time, and in one of them (September 30, 1915) he managed to include 230 such letters to Armenians in America. Some of these letters reached their destination, others were intercepted, but Davis kept trying. After February 1916, however, he was no longer allowed to send sealed messages to the embassy. Hundreds of letters had nevertheless reached their destination before the crackdown, and money was sent by their relatives. The embassy in turn began to transmit inquiries from Armenians in the United States regarding the welfare of their families in Turkey. Davis estimated that he received inquiries regarding 12,000 persons. In all of these cases, he had his staff investigate and try to find the individuals, so that he could supply the requested information.[76] The Turkish authorities objected to these activities, filing protests through the Ottoman Foreign Ministry to the U.S. Embassy in Constantinople, arguing that the consul "was interfering with a purely domestic matter" and "acting on behalf of Ottoman subjects both in Turkey

[75] Ibid., pp. 55-58.
[76] Ibid., pp. 100-01.

and in the United States without the knowledge or consent of the Ottoman Government."[77]

Davis resorted to ingenious methods to get his messages out. Since it was forbidden to refer to Armenians by name, he would make indirect but specific references. For example, the State Department might pass along requests for information from relatives in the United States concerning certain Armenians; in reply Davis would cite the exact number and date of the Department's instructions and then provide any information he possessed by referring to the "first" or "eighth" or "fifteenth" person listed. If he knew that an Armenian had slipped out through the Dersim to behind the Russian lines, he would convey that information by suggesting that "Willoughby Smith might be able to make the payment," a reference to the U.S. consul in Tiflis at the time. Davis was able to continue in this way for a year, until February 1917, when the United States severed diplomatic relations with Germany, and the Turkish authorities became much stricter. Davis continued to receive requests for information, but he was unable to reply.

Whenever there was no support or it was necessary to tide people over until the payments arrived, Davis distributed relief funds that became available for that purpose in early 1916: "I began in this way to carry on systematic relief work for the people there, in addition to my other duties, and devoted a part of my time to that during the remainder of my stay." He explained: "In all there were about a thousand people who depended upon what I gave them, but the needs were so great, the money so limited, and the workers so few that even then it was not possible to help everyone who was in want." The consul was surprised by the number of Armenians who had somehow managed to escape the deportation orders and realized that survivors from many of the towns and villages in the area learned of the aid available in Mezre and came there. Davis later admitted that "the payment of these remittances and the correspondence

---

[77] Elkus to Secretary of State, Feb. 6, 1917, encl. Note Verbale from the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the U.S. Embassy in Constantinople, Nov. 16, 1916 (RG 59, 867.4016/313, microcopy 353, roll 45). The Turkish authorities were particularly incensed that the French journal *Armenia* had reprinted part of a 1915 report from Davis to Morgenthau concerning the Armenian deportations. Davis denied that he had given out for publication any information on this subject.

growing out of them was in many respects the most important and satisfactory part of the work of the Consulate." The American missionaries were also engaged in relief work, specifically distributing bread and clothing regularly in Kharpert and Mezre to several thousand of the needy.[78]

That Davis was able to accomplish as much as he did may be partly explained by his curious relations with Turkish officials, who constituted his major social contact. The other foreign consuls had left the area, and the only Americans living in Mezre were Dr. Atkinson of the American hospital and some of his staff. Most of the American missionaries were up in the city of Kharpert, which was difficult to visit in the evenings. Thus Davis' report of his experiences, written after his return to the United States in 1917, includes vivid descriptions of regular social gatherings with Turkish officials. These accounts of cordial dinners and games of bridge take on a surreal character when one considers that everyone present was aware of the terrible human suffering being inflicted by these same Turkish officials on the defenseless Armenian population, that the American consul was being ignored or even humiliated in his official dealings, and that the American missionary establishment he had been assigned to protect was in desperate straits. Perhaps the consul felt he had no choice but to fraternize with these Turkish men, but one wonders how he could tolerate the hypocrisy of the situation. Davis admits that he did "not pretend to understand the Turkish character." Though "an exceedingly ignorant and uncultured man," the vali Sabit Bey "in many ways seemed kind and charitable in spite of the fact that he was one of the principal agents of the Turkish government in committing its awful crimes against humanity." In the consul's opinion, the vali was not creating the government's policy against the Armenians but was carrying out orders received from Constantinople. "I have often thought that it might have been much worse if any other Turk had been in office in that vilayet during the same period," Davis speculated. At the same time, he related countless cases in which he personally pleaded with the vali to save some of the victims, soften the cruelty, or provide relief—almost always in vain. The only small bit of leniency shown

---

[78] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, pp. 96-107. The missionary relief effort is described in Riggs, *Days of Tragedy*, pp. 154-69.

by the vali was to close his eyes to the flight of some Armenians to the Dersim Kurds, and thence across the border to salvation in Russia. A native himself of the Dersim, Sabit Bey was thereby helping to enrich his fellow Kurds, who charged the Armenians heavily for these services. Indeed, Sabit Bey probably profited as well, Davis suspected, by accepting bribes from the Kurds. Small as this concession was, these flights to the Dersim were stopped absolutely by his successor, the new vali.

Davis was particularly friendly with the commander of the Eleventh Army Corps, Colonel Mehmed Vehib Bey, with whom he was able to converse in French. But Vehib Bey did not assume command until late 1915, when most of the Armenians had already been deported. Davis cultivated relations with higher Turkish officials as well, for example, Ahmed Izzet Pasha, commander of the Turkish Army of the Caucasus and formerly Minister of War, who passed through the area frequently and made Kharpert his military headquarters in February 1917. Davis also met a member of the triumvirate ruling Turkey during World War I and largely responsible for the policy of exterminating the Armenians, the powerful Minister of War Enver Pasha, who stopped in Kharpert twice during this period.[79] Clearly, Davis' reporting was well known at the highest echelons of the Turkish government. During Enver's first visit, in May 1916, Davis found himself seated at dinner opposite the minister and next to the German military attaché. When in the course of conversation the latter asked how the consul passed his time, Davis was startled to have Enver join in eagerly: "Yes, Mr. Consul, what do you do now to amuse yourself? You have finished your reports, haven't you? You no longer write letters, do you?"[80]

Perhaps these social contacts with Turkish officials enabled Davis to understand so clearly the aims and objectives of the Turkish government and to recognize their implications for the American missionary and diplomatic presence. "There is no doubt in my mind that all the American missionaries will be obliged to leave," Davis wrote on June 30, 1915, in his initial dispatch to the State Depart-

---

[79] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, pp. 41, 42, 71, 116-17.

[80] Ibid., p. 117. Given in French: "Oui, Monsieur le Consul, que faites-vous maintenant pour vous amuser? Vous avez fini vos rapports, n'est-ce pas? Vous n'écrivez plus de lettres, n'est-ce pas?"

ment regarding the deportation orders. "Whether they are expelled or not, there will be nothing for them to do here." With the departure of the missionaries and the destruction of all businesses in the area, "there will be no object in maintaining a consular post either here or at Diarbekir, or in any other part of this region."[81] Shortly thereafter he added:

> The evident plan of the Government is to give no opportunity for any educational or religious work to be done here by foreign missionaries. Some Armenian women will be taken as Moslem wives and some children will be brought up as Moslems, but none of them will be allowed to come under foreign influences. The country is to be purely Moslem and nothing else. Some of the missionaries think they would like to remain here and try to work among Moslems. I not only think it would be very dangerous for them to undertake it but do not believe they will be allowed to do anything along that line. I shall not be surprised, as I have said before, if all the American missionaries are ordered to leave here in the near future. If they are not, they will be so effectually prevented from doing any kind of work that it will be entirely useless for them to remain here. Furthermore, they will be annoyed in many ways by the local officials. I do not think for a moment that they will be allowed to open any of the schools again and it's quite probable that the hospital may be ordered closed.[82]

Under these circumstances, Davis recommended that the missionaries leave the area, temporarily at least, as soon as possible. He noted, however, that the situation was too dangerous for them to depart at once, a conclusion supported by the vali, who had intimated that perhaps the Americans might not be permitted to leave at all. "Some of them [the missionaries] think that we know too much about what is happening in the interior of Turkey and the authorities do not intend to let any Americans leave here alive to tell about it." Though Davis minimized this possibility, he made it clear "that the life of every American here is in danger and that the danger is increasing."[83] He was constantly concerned with the health and welfare of the American missionaries, who continued their work under crushing

---

[81] Report, Davis to Morgenthau, June 30, 1915, p. 10.
[82] Ibid., July 11, 1915, pp. 7-8.
[83] Ibid., p. 8.

mental and physical stress. Several of the older missionaries died, their deaths attributed to heartbreak over the fate of the Armenian people. Others, overworked and exhausted, became victims of the diseases ravaging the land, especially cholera and typhus. A few were deported by the Ottoman government, and still others died of unknown causes.[84] It was extremely difficult for Consul Davis to keep in touch with the missionaries who were not stationed in Kharpert. Missionaries Myrtle O. Shane and Grisell H. McLaren of Bitlis, for example, were unable to inform Davis of their situation despite repeated attempts to get messages to him.[85] As soon as the political situation appeared to have eased a bit, in the fall of 1915, it was decided to send home a group of missionaries, including Euphrates College President Ernest W. Riggs and his family, who took the southern route safely to Beirut.

When the United States broke diplomatic relations with Germany in February 1917, Davis realized that a break in relations might take place with Turkey as well, and he started to make preparations to close the consulate, mainly by distributing the valuables remaining in his safe. Then he began burning the cipher codes and the more important documents in the office. Finally, after the United States declared war on Germany, Turkey's ally, on April 6 and severed relations with Turkey on April 20, the consul received instructions from the embassy to hasten to Constantinople, taking with him all the Americans who wished to leave and who were permitted to do

---

[84] An incomplete list of American missionaries serving in eastern Turkey who died during this period include, among the older missionaries, Charlotte Ely in Bitlis, Daniel M. B. Thom, M.D., of Urfa (who had been deported by the Turkish military and died in Sivas, on his way home), and Mary E. Barnum in Kharpert. Those who became victims of disease included Henry H. Atkinson, M.D., in Kharpert, Elizabeth Freeman Barrows Ussher in Van, Mary Louise Graffam in Sivas, and Emma Barnum Riggs and Annie Riggs (wife and daughter of Henry Riggs) in Kharpert. The circumstances surrounding the deaths of others remained unclear, such as the Reverend Francis H. Leslie in Urfa, who was reported by the Turkish authorities as having committed suicide, and Reverend George P. Knapp of Bitlis, who was arrested by the Turkish military and died soon after in Diarbekir.

[85] Realizing that their messages were not reaching Davis, McLaren and Shane appealed to the German vice consul in Erzerum, Max Erwin von Scheubner Richter, to inform Davis of their situation. A copy of the letter, dated October 14, 1915, was enclosed in Morgenthau to Secretary of State, Dec. 28, 1915, RG 59, 867.4016/254 (microcopy 353, roll 44). There is no record of Scheubner Richter's response.

so. Davis tried, but did not succeed, in bringing out Armenians he considered to be naturalized U.S. citizens, as Turkish officials were adamant in refusing permits in these cases. The remaining American missionaries decided, reluctantly, to accompany the consul, transferring their remaining relief activities to the local German mission.[86] Of the 72 members of the American mission in the consular district in 1914, only four now remained: one in Sivas and three in Mardin.[87] Davis with his entourage left Kharpert on May 16, 1917, three eventful years after he had arrived and sixteen years after the opening of the consulate. The journey was a long one, requiring eighteen days on horseback and carriage from Kharpert to reach the railroad at Eregli and then three days by train to Constantinople. All the Americans were treated with great courtesy by Turkish officials, while at the same time they were being closely guarded, ostensibly for their protection but partially, Davis suspected, "to prevent us from observing things too closely on the way." After a six-week delay in Constantinople awaiting the necessary papers, the group left the Turkish capital for home on July 16, 1917.[88] Thus ended the American presence in Kharpert province.[89]

---

[86] The missionary group included Henry H. Riggs, Mrs. Tacy Atkinson with her three children, Myrtle Shane, Grisell McLaren, Isabelle Harley, and Dr. Ruth Parmelee. German missionary Johannes Ehmann in turn appointed Maria Jacobsen to continue the American relief work in Kharpert. Jacobsen had been sent out and was supported by the Danish Foreign Missionary Board, but she had been associated with the American mission during the previous eight years. See Riggs, *Days of Tragedy*, pp. 209-10.

[87] Davis, *Slaughterhouse Province*, p. 122.

[88] After his return to the United States, Davis supplied the State Department with an account of his trip home, in "General Conditions in Turkey," Oct. 19, 1917, RG 59, 867.00/803 (microcopy 353, roll 6). Henry Riggs also described the trip in *Days of Tragedy*, pp. 210-15.

[89] There was a brief American presence in Kharpert after the war, when the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE), later incorporated by an act of Congress as the Near East Relief (NER), sent workers and supplies to the area. The Reverend Henry H. Riggs returned in April 1919 as the head of the American team. He was expelled in late 1920 by the authorities of the Turkish Nationalist government established in Angora by Mustafa Kemal. Increasing harassment by the Turkish authorities led the NER to withdraw from Kharpert in the summer of 1922. See the account by medical missionary, Dr. Ruth A. Parmelee, *A Pioneer in the Euphrates Valley* (privately printed, 1967), pp. 34-57.

Effects of the American Presence in Kharpert

The major purpose of the consulate in Kharpert had been to protect American interests, which at the time meant mainly looking out for the missionaries. Neither the United States government nor the missionary leaders gave serious thought to the long-term effects of their policies on the primary focus of their activities, the Armenian people. In a sense, the greater the success of the missionary programs and the more the Armenians became better educated and advanced than their Muslim neighbors, the more they became restless under the inefficiency and injustice of the Ottoman administration. The consuls were well aware of this process. Consul Norton addressed an inquiry to missionaries in 1904 with two penetrating questions. The first question: "How far have the results of training in American schools and contact with American ideas unfitted Armenians to live quietly here under existing conditions?" All the missionaries replied that they taught Armenians to obey the government but admitted that in a broader sense an American education, with its stress on individual initiative, progress, justice, and freedom, did little to reconcile Armenians to the inept and arbitrary rule. The second question: "What is the especial duty of the American people in connection with the Armenian Question? What is the duty of the United States government?" Not surprisingly, missionaries supported action by the United States to ameliorate conditions. "The oppression and outrage here are much greater than that which compelled the United States to act in Cuba," wrote one. Another said: "The brotherhood of man demands something more than mere expressions of sympathy."[90]

While American leaders on many occasions spoke out in favor of the weak and oppressed Armenians, the Department of State consistently opposed any but the most cautious action (such as moving around the ships of the Mediterranean fleet). Typical is a statement in 1909 by Acting Secretary of State Huntington Wilson, which was reproduced in the annual collection of State Department documents:

> Every thinking American deplores the antagonism, differences, and opposing ambitions which have arrayed the racial and religious

[90] Despatches from Harput, no. 133, Sept. 5, 1904.

> elements of the Turkish population against each other. The sufferings of the innocent victims in the late outrages have deeply touched American sympathies. Neither in these events nor in times past has this government looked on unmoved. It has always wished that it had the power to prevent such sufferings, but it is convinced that, in the obvious impossibility of intervention, it is powerless. The broader tendencies developing in the Near East and the moral suasion of the Christian treaty powers must be trusted finally to prevail to reconcile the opposing factions.[91]

In characterizing the policies of the European powers in the Ottoman Empire, the United States Minister in Constantinople, John Leishman, wrote that they "interfere with the internal affairs in Turkey—not enough to do good, but just sufficient to cause considerable harm."[92] In a sense this was true of the American presence, both missionary and official, in Kharpert. By encouraging the aspirations of the reform-minded element in the population—mainly Armenians —the Americans raised expectations they were unwilling or unable to support in the long run.

During World War I, Consul Davis was placed in a most difficult position in Kharpert. He was acutely conscious of being in the midst of one of the greatest human catastrophes of all time, yet he was all but powerless to deal with the situation. Living in a period when concepts of universal human rights were in their formative state and representing a country that had not yet assumed a major role on the world stage, Davis did not have a clear definition of his sphere of action. As an American and a humanitarian, he was appalled by what he saw, and he tried to do what he could to alleviate the suffering and hardship. From a practical point of view, however, his authority was severely limited, and he lacked physical force or backing to impose his point of view. Clearly visible in this situation is the genesis of that dichotomy in United States foreign policy between, on the one hand, an internationalism and idealism that strives to limit poverty and injustice in the world and to spread the benefits of freedom and liberty to all people, and, on the other hand, an isola-

---

[91] *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1909* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), p. 557.

[92] Leishman (Constantinople) to Secretary of State, no. 243, Aug. 4, 1902, RG 59, Diplomatic Despatches, Turkey (microcopy 46, roll 72).

tionism and a pragmatism that encourage Americans to limit their activities abroad and to concentrate their efforts on building their own society at home.